

The UK's public sector productivity problem

In an age of digital investment, artificial intelligence, smart phone activity and other leaps forward in productivity from technology, you would expect the UK public services to have had a good 25 years achieving more from its workforce thanks to investment and modernisation. Instead the Office of National Statistics reports that public sector productivity by the end of last year was lower than 25 years ago, at a time when the private sector had continued to show reasonable annual growth. In the whole period 1997-2019 the one fifth of the UK economy that is public services managed growth of just 3.7% in productivity. In 2020 productivity fell 13.3% thanks to lockdowns. In the following two years when the private sector made a full recovery from covid the public sector showed a rise of 7.3% in productivity in 2021 and of 1.9% in 2022, leaving it 5.2% below 2019 levels, and 1.7% below 1997.

UK public services are very labour intensive. We all want plenty of great teachers, good doctors and nurses and well trained uniformed police and defence personnel to take care of us and protect us. Behind them lie large back offices with people giving the front line professionals support. In these areas more can be done by computer and by organising workloads and shifts well. Back up staff can keep more of the records and handle more of the administration to get the best out of the public facing staff. In too many areas management imposes a wide range of duties, checks and forms on staff which can get in the way of undertaking the day job instead of supporting its better performance.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has been put in charge of trying to cut through the complexities and overhead costs to deliver just that amount of administrative support and good planning that a successful service needs. He needs to do a lot to improve management performance especially in the NHS where huge sums of additional spending have been released without a proportionate increase in output. Your thoughts on how this can be achieved would be of interest.

Cutting CO2 , raising more tax revenue and cutting imports – why we should get out more of our own oil and gas

Yesterday I met some experts on energy and supply chains. They told me that the official figures implying there would be twice as much CO 2 if we import

LNG in place of domestic North Sea gas down a pipe was a big underestimate by the government. If you take into account the different levels of emissions in extracting the gas, in compressing it, in transporting it as a cold liquid and then converting it back it could as much as seven times as much CO₂ is produced by all these processes. Those who argue we must keep our own gas in the ground to speed net zero are wrong – it would delay our road as we would have to import the gas we did not produce for the rest of this decade at least. There is no way we will have enough people with electric heating or electric cars by 2030 or nearly enough grid capacity to power them to do without much of the oil and gas we currently need to stay warm and to get about.

The investment task to replace all the current oil and gas based activities and put in enough reliable electrical power is colossal. People wanting to put in new windfarms are being told there is a queue into the next decade to get access to grid to carry extra renewable power to users at the times when renewable would be available. The Grid is only just considering how to expand, which it would need to do by a factor of 5 or more by 2050 to take out our current dependence on gas heating, gas industrial processes, and petrol, diesel and aviation spirit for transport. It would also need much enhanced electrical cable capacity under every street to provide enough power to each electrically heated home with an electric car to recharge.

The UK needs to improve our energy security and self sufficiency. Being reliant on imports by pipe and wire from a continent short of energy and recovering from the need to end its dependence on Russian fossil fuels, we could run out of energy at crucial times. We always used to be self sufficient. We have a good mixture of natural resources to provide more oil and gas, wind power, nuclear and the rest we will need. To have a successful economy with well paid ,jobs we need more reliable and affordable power. Letting the market work with less interruption would help bring this about mainly with private sector investment capital.

Bohunt School 6 th form

Conservative Councillors write about the failure to provide the 6th form at Bohunt on time

Bohunt Sixth form expansion delayed again...

In March 2022 following a long public campaign by residents of Finchampstead Wokingham Borough Council reached a deal with the Bohunt Trust to expand the educational provision at Bohunt School. Two petitions were raised by local residents with well over 1400 signatures and the campaign was supported by local conservative cllrs as well as the local MP James Sunderland. This agreement was that WBC and Bohunt would fund the provision of a brand new 6th form facility, additional year 7 places and send provision. This new facility

was scheduled to open in September 2023 giving much needed provision for an additional 200 – 300 pupils

In May 2022 following the local elections the Liberal Democrats took control of Wokingham Council. In public they were keen to reassure residents they still planned to proceed with expansion at Bohunt however the lack of any meaningful progress on the ground made it clear that all was not well. Costs had risen on the building programme and the crucial stumbling block was Wokingham Borough Council insisting on a new scope and refusing to part fund its share. 14 months after the Liberals took control of the council there is still no agreement on funding and without movement from Wokingham Borough Council no chance of this moving forwards

We have been advised that even if funding was agreed today there is little chance of a new building being ready by September 2024 due to logistical issues of construction and hiring the relevant staff. The council have now formally admitted the sixth form will not open (as they promised at the may 2023 local elections) in September 2023. It is now time for them to be honest and commit publicly to fund this expansion rather than the endless misleading statements about commitment with no funding

We are very dissapointed that WBC continues to fail to honour the promises it gave to the Finchampstead and Aborfield community in March 2022. It is wrong that children from across the south of the borough face long journeys out of borough at Farnborough or to the north of wokingham for 6th form provision because there is no facility nearby. It is wrong that WBC is building 2 new send schools on green fields at Rooks Nest when alternative provision could have been provided earlier and at less cost to the taxpayer at Bohunt. It is wrong that WBC is walking away from additional year 7 provision at Bohunt meaning children from Finchampstead face long journeys across wokingham every day because the capacity at bohunt is full. The catchment area at bohunt gets smaller year by year. Bohunt is a successful and well loved school. WBC should be supporting and developing successful schools in the borough. Children in the south of the borough are being treated like second class citizens and this is not acceptable. The south is forced to take all the housing but gets no infrastructure – this is wrong

We remain fully committed to seeing the 6th form, extra year 7 and send provision at Bohunt and will continue to campaign for this important facility to be provided

Cllr Charles Margetts, Cllr Rebecca Margetts, Cllr Peter Harper and George Evans former Conservative candidate for Barkham |)

[My Interventions in the Draft Postal](#)

Packets (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2023 (2)

The form of this statutory instrument is to amend regulations relating to foreign postal packets. It includes GB-NI postal packets alongside foreign postal packets in important matters in the regulations specified. How can the Government defend that? They are effectively treating Northern Ireland and GB as foreign countries to each other, accepting a form of regulation designed for a true international border and clearly violating the terms of the internal market legislation governing the United Kingdom? *[Interruption.]*

Victoria Atkins, Financial Secretary to the Treasury

If I may, I will address that point, and then I promise I will come to the hon. Member for North Antrim in due course. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham used that language, so that I can make it clear for the purposes of *Hansard* that this is not about trying to differentiate or draw lines around our precious Union.

My Interventions in the Draft Postal Packets (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2023 (3)

John Redwood:

I thought that, in law, and certainly politically, the Good Friday agreement took precedence over other agreements, given its importance. How is this measure in any way compatible with the Good Friday agreement when it does not have the consent of the Unionist community—an important underlying principle of the whole agreement? I would also like to assure the Minister that I do not use the phrase “hard compromise”, and I have not been recommending these kinds of proposals.

Victoria Atkins, Financial Secretary to the Treasury:

I am sorry; I did not catch my right hon. Friend’s last point. Would he repeat it?

I thought the Minister implied earlier that I thought that this was a hard compromise. I do not; I think it is bad policy.

Victoria Atkins, Financial Secretary to the Treasury:

I think my right hon. Friend misheard me. I was referring to the Northern Ireland Minister, the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker). I would not dream of putting words in the mouth of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham.

A point was made about the Road Haulage Association. The answer to that

intervention is that the powers were available to Border Force in respect of international movements. We understand the sensitivities and the concerns raised about making powers available for GB to NI movements, but we would say that that is not the same as making these international movements.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham asked a very important question about the Good Friday agreement. We do not accept that this is contrary to the Good Friday agreement. These regulations are in fact an enabler to the agreement that we have negotiated. As I said, we have ensured that consumer interests in Northern Ireland and the interests of British businesses selling to Northern Ireland are protected, but that means that an incentive now exists to move goods into Northern Ireland and take them across the Irish border to avoid EU tariffs. If we are to manage that risk—*[Interruption.]*